

**ANALYSIS OF JUSTIFICATION OF IMPORTANCE OF STUDY IN
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ARTICLES BY NON-NATIVE ENGLISH
SCHOLARS IN MALAYSIA**

SOONG GZE PENG

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(TANDATANGAN PENYELIA)

Alamat tetap:

LOT 1972, RPR BATU 6,
JALAN PUJUT-LUTONG,
98000 MIRI, SARAWAK

DR. TING SU HIE
(Nama Penyelia)

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(Tarikh Serahan)

(Tandatangan Pelajar)
Soong Gze Peng
15851

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where due reference is made.

(Date submitted)

(Student’s signature)
Soong Gze Peng
15851

The project entitled 'Analysis of justification of importance of study in empirical research articles by non-native English scholars in Malaysia' was prepared by Soong Gze Peng and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (Teaching English as Second Language).

It is hereby confirmed that the student has done
all necessary amendments of the project for acceptance:

(Dr. Ting Su Hie)

Date: _____

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the academic writing styles of non-native English scholars in justifying the importance and contribution of their studies in applied linguistic empirical research articles published in Malaysian journals. It examined the structural and linguistic features of rationalizing the importance of studies in introduction and closure sections. The 50 research articles were selected from 7 online Malaysian journals. The structural analysis of justification of importance of study were adapted from Swales' revised 2004 CARS model and Yang and Allison moves and steps of closure sections (2003). The framework for analysis of language features were adapted from Martín-Martín (2008) hedging and adopted from Hyland (2001) self-mention terms. The results revealed that many scholars did not provide a strong argument on the importance of their studies in introduction sections by anchoring it in the literature while the contribution of study in closure sections was adequate. However, there was a lack of justifying the contribution of study in the Discussion sections. This was probably due to the preference of NNES scholars to write contribution of studies in Conclusion and Pedagogic Implications sections unless only Discussion sections were present. Besides, the structure of justification of studies in the examined sections were recursive and non-linear. This was likely due to the recursive nature of writing. Meanwhile, the linguistic analysis showed that non-native English scholars frequently used hedging in making tentative claims on the contribution of their studies but did not often employ self-mention terms. Hedging was often used to make vague and uncertain claims on the need to conduct the current study due to the lack of empirical literature on the research problem and the broad contributions of the study. It was also used to mention how the findings of the studies might lead to future research and how the findings might be applicable in language teaching and learning. Although there was a lack of usage in self-mention terms, the scholars generally preferred to use first person pronouns. The lack of using self-mention terms may be due to the preference of reducing personal attributions and probably the lack of self-confidence in portraying their scholarly identities in the research articles. Thus, this study may have implication in the teaching and material development of academic and research writing for university students and novice researchers.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji cara penulisan akademik oleh para penyelidik bukan Inggeris untuk merasionalkan kepentingan kajian mereka di dalam artikel dari jurnal bidang pengajian bahasa di Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji struktur dan penggunaan bahasa untuk kepentingan kajian di bahagian pengenalan dan penutup dalam 50 artikel dari 7 jurnal di Malaysia. Analisis struktur dan penggunaan bahasa untuk merasionalkan kepentingan kajian telah diadaptasikan daripada Swales' kemaskini CARS model (2003), Yang dan Allison (2003) struktur bahagian penutup di artikel dalam jurnal, Martin-Martin (2008) 'hedging' dan berdasarkan Hyland's (2001) 'self-mention terms'. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan banyak penyelidik bukan Inggeris mempunyai persoalan yang lemah untuk kepentingan kajian mereka kerana tidak disokong oleh teori dan kajian yang berkaitan dengan kajian mereka. Dapatan menunjukkan penulisan rasional kepentingan kajian di bahagian penutup dalam artikel adalah baik. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan para penyelidik bukan Inggeris kurang menyatakan sumbangan kajian mereka di bahagian penbincangan. Ini mungkin disebabkan oleh kecenderungan para penyelidik penutur bahasa Inggeris bukan natif untuk menyatakan sumbangan kajian mereka dalam bahagian penutup dan implikasi pedagogi. Di samping itu, struktur rasional kepentingan kajian tidak mempunyai susunan yang linear. Ini mungkin disebabkan oleh proses penulisan yang tidak linear. Dari segi penggunaan bahasa, para penyelidik kerap menggunakan 'hedging' untuk membuat tuntutan bagi sumbangan kajian mereka tetapi tidak kerap menggunakan 'self-mention terms'. 'Hedging' kerap digunakan untuk menyatakan pernyataan yang kurang pasti terhadap keperluan untuk menjalankan kajian disebabkan kekurangan sorotan kajian berbentuk empirikal terhadap masalah kajian dan sumbangan yang luas terhadap kajian. Ini juga digunakan untuk menyatakan bagaimana dapatan kajian menyumbang ke arah kajian akan datang dan bagaimana dapatan dapat digunakan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa. Maka, kajian ini mungkin mempunyai implikasi kepada pengajaran dan pembinaan bahan mengajar dari segi akademik and penyelidikan penulisan untuk pelajar-pelajar universiti.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CARS	Create a Research Space
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
EAP	English for Academic Purpose
EBC	English for Business Communication
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
NES	Native English Speakers
NNES	Non-native English speakers
RA	Research article
RAs	Research articles
UKM	<i>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an introduction on the background of the analysis of justification of importance of study in empirical research articles written by non-native English scholars in Malaysian journals. The aim, objectives, operational definition of terms, significance and scope of the study are also presented in this section.

1.1 Background

The English language is a prominent language in spoken and written academic discourse for communicating and exchanging knowledge among academicians and experts. Academic writing serves as the construction of critical thinking that enables authors to think creatively, achieve understanding and memory, evaluate the authors' outputs such as written assignments and written exams, develop good communication skills and train future professionals (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis & Swann, 2003). It consists of several genres such as procedure, information report, explanation, exposition, discussion, recount, description (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000) and research report. University students are required to write and submit their research reports as a partial fulfillment for their degrees, master degrees and doctoral degrees. Research reports consist of research articles (RAs), theses or dissertations and conference papers.

Nevertheless, different disciplines and different educational level have different emphasis on these text types. For example, there is more emphasis for

engineering postgraduate students to describe charts but more emphasis on writing lab reports for undergraduate chemistry students (Hyland, 2002). Heaton (1994) also reported that a student taking the same course in institution A may need different language skills or different emphasis on the same skills compared to another student taking the same course in institution B. This has shown that “disciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practice and different ways of seeing the world” (Hyland, 2002, p. 389). This has led to the emergence of various genres for various types of language functions, structures and words in order to integrate and generate meaning in academic writing (Cullip & Carol, 2002).

Furthermore, RAs consist of argumentation, review, empirical research papers, responses and reactions to earlier work and short communications (Swales & Feak, 2004). An empirical RA consists of abstract, introduction, method, result, discussion, conclusion and may include pedagogic implication sections. It reports on the research problem, objectives, methodology, results, findings and contribution of a study. The contribution of a study also referred to significance of study in the Introduction section of thesis, dissertation, conference paper and RA. It is commonly found in the Introduction and Discussion sections of research reports. It serves to promote the rationale and necessity of a research and allow the author(s) to strongly state the importance of the study (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993).

Interestingly, several studies (e.g. Cooper, 1985; Crookes, 1984; Hopkins, 1985, as cited in Bunton, 2002) have documented the absence of justification of importance of study in Introduction sections of RAs in some academic communities. In less competitive academic communities, the justification of importance of study in Introduction sections is perceived as insignificant or trivial (Ahmad, 1997; Burgess, 2002; Lee, 2000; Melander, 1998 as cited in Kwan, 2006). They found that stating justification of importance of study by counter-claiming previous studies (based on Swales’ 1990 CARS model) is an irregular feature in some non-Anglophone and close-knit academic communities. Ahmad (1997, as cited in Kanoksilaptham, 2005) noted that Malaysian scholars

frequently avoid stating the justification of their studies. Taylor and Chen (1991 as cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2005) found that Chinese scholars showed precaution and hesitation when they are justifying of contribution of their studies in the Introduction sections of their RAs. This is due to the perception that stating the justification of importance of study in relation to previous studies is a fault finding strategy (Kanoksilaptham, 2005), a threat to face value (Kwan, 2006) and merely a replication instead of an indication of gaps of previous studies (Ahmad, 1997 as cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2005). Thus, justification of disciplinary variation and cultural variation has influenced the rhetorical structure of RA introductions (Kanoksilapatham, 2005).

Furthermore, the textual analysis of Yang and Allison (2003) on the closure sections in 40 empirical applied linguistics RAs has led to the conclusion of moves and steps for Discussion, Conclusion and Pedagogic Implication sections. Certain moves and steps for these sections correlate with justification of contribution of study. Therefore, the related moves and steps can be selected to analyze the textual structure of justification of importance of study in these sections. Based on Yang and Allison (2003) findings, the closure sections shared similar moves (related to justification of value of study), that is, making deductions from the research and evaluating the study holistically. Similar steps relevant to justification of importance of study are shared by Discussion, Conclusion and Pedagogic Implication sections, which are *indicating significance or advantage*, *drawing pedagogic implication* and *recommending further research*. Other move and step related to justification of importance of study in Pedagogic Implications sections are *dealing with pedagogic issues* and *indicating necessity for pedagogic change*. These moves and steps are employed to rationalize the contribution of the research in the research field and emphasize the worthiness of the study.

Furthermore, Swales (1990), Nwogu (1997), Posteguillo (1999) and Kanoksilapatham (2008) have identified the regular features of lexical and grammatical items in justification of importance of study in research articles. These linguistic characterizations include hedging and self-mention terms.

Hedging functions as “an expression of tentative possibilities” (Hyland, 1996, p. 433 as cited in Varttala, 1999) regarding the theoretical and practical contribution of a study. The first person pronouns and self-mention terms allow the author to create a scholarly identity, an authoritative stance, persuade acceptance and recognition from editors, readers and scientific-academic community, emphasize the importance of the study and promote the contribution of the study (Hyland, 2001; Kuo 1999). Thus, it is necessary to examine these linguistic features in justification of contribution of study in introductory and closure sections of RAs.

Unfortunately, despite the wealth of knowledge incurred from genre analysis and systemic functional perspective of RAs, the justification of importance of study has received little attention in applied linguistics. Previous studies have identified justification of importance of study in Introduction (e.g. Kanoksilapatham, 2005, 2008; Samraj, 2005; Yang & Allison, 2003), Discussion (e.g. Holmes, 1997; Kanoksilaptham, 2005; Yang & Allison, 2003), Conclusion (Yang & Allison, 2003) and Pedagogic Implications (Yang & Allison, 2003) sections but have not thoroughly investigated the structure and linguistic features of justification of contribution of study in empirical RAs. Little is known about how scientist-author presents rationale of importance of study.

1.2 Purpose of this Study

This study aims to examine the academic writing style of justifying contribution of study in applied linguistics empirical research papers by non-native English speakers (NNES) in Malaysia. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to:

1. investigate the structure of justification of importance of study in Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion and Pedagogic Implications sections, and
2. investigate the linguistic features, that is, self-mention terms and hedging used in justifying the contribution of study.

Thus, the present study investigates the justification of value of study in empirical applied linguistics RAs written by NNES scholars in Malaysian journals.

1.3 Significance of Study

Findings of this study may have implication in the teaching of academic writing, research writing and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for undergraduates and graduates of non-native speakers and perhaps native speakers too. Academic writing, research writing and ESP instructors and course developers may be enlightened about the appropriate academic style of justifying justification of importance of study in research reports. This may help EAP and ESP instructors to teach and scaffold students in writing justification of the study by making students aware of the structure and language features used in justifying the importance of study.

Teaching materials such as worksheets, tasksheets, workbooks and textbooks may be designed and created (Holmes, 1997) to meet the competency requirement and skills required by non-native speakers (and perhaps native speakers too) in order to perform well in the prescribed writing tasks of their disciplines and educational level (Hyland, 2002). The teaching materials could incorporate writing tasks that scaffold students to write justification of importance of study for research reports that adheres to the conventions of writing justification of importance of study. This may develop a keen awareness of the structure and language use of justification of contribution of study by students.

1.4 Operational Definition of Terms

1.4.1 Research Article

A research article is a type of research report that reports the results of a study by a researcher or a team of researcher that aims to solve a research problem, answers its research question and offers a concluding argument (Zimmerman & Rodrigues, 1992). Therefore, the present study defined research articles as applied linguistics empirical research articles.

1.4.2 Justification of importance of study

The justification of importance of study (also known as justification of value of study and justification of contribution of study) addresses researchers' firm stances regarding their research and promotes the value, necessity, worthiness, relationship, rationale and contribution of the studies by authors in their disciplines, research areas and for the advancement and pursuit of knowledge (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993).

Hence, justification of importance of study in the present study can be found in Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion and Pedagogic Implications sections in the research articles. In introductory section, it is used to state the value of the study by indicating a gap in previous studies, provide more description on what previous studies have found and not found and how the study can contribute to its research area and other fields. In closure sections, the justification of value of study is stated in terms of how the findings of the study contributes to the research area and other fields, how it can provide a basis for further research and how the findings can be useful and applicable in language teaching and learning.

1.4.3 Linguistic Features

The linguistic features of justification of importance of study are hedging (*perhaps, probably, potential, likely*) and self-mention terms (*I, we, the researcher, the authors*). These linguistic items are regular features found in justifying the contribution of study.

1.4.4 Structure

Justification of contribution of study is stated in the Introduction sections by establishing the niche of the study (move 2, see Table 5) via *indicating a gap, adding to what is known* and *presenting positive justification*, in which, the author stated that the research questions pursued in the study have not been answered or not fully answered by previous studies, what findings can be added to the existing research and the broad contribution of the study. The contribution of study is also

stated by *stating the value of the present study*, which describes the specific contribution of the study in the research area.

The justification of importance of study can also be found in Discussion, Conclusion and Pedagogic Implication sections of empirical research articles. The justification of importance of study is stated in the Discussion sections via *evaluating the study* (move 6) by *indicating significance or advantage* and *making deduction from the research* by *recommending further research* and *drawing pedagogic implication* (move 7, see Table 6).

It is presented in the Conclusion sections by *evaluating the study* (move 2) by *indicating significance or advantage* and *making deductions from the research* (move 3) by *recommending further research* and *drawing pedagogic implication* (see Table 7).

Lastly, it is presented in the Pedagogic Implication sections by *dealing with pedagogic issues* (move 2) via *indicating the necessity for pedagogic change* and *drawing pedagogic implications*, *evaluating the study* (move 3) via *indicating significance/advantage* and *deductions from the research* (move 4) via *recommending further research* (see Table 8).

1.4.5 Non-native English Speakers (NNES)

Non-native English speakers (NNES) referred to speakers whose first language is not English language. English language may be a second language or foreign language to non-native English speakers (Hyland, 2004). The present study defined non-native English speakers (NNES) as scholars whose first language are not English language and wrote their applied linguistics empirical research articles in Malaysia and are published in Malaysian journals.

1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of this study includes the ideational, interpersonal and textual function of English language in academic and research writing that was employed by non-native English speaker's (NNES) research articles. This study does not

include other languages such as Tamil, Chinese or Malay language. It does not investigate the writing process of NNES scholars in composing research articles. It does not examine the interference and effects of mother tongues or dialects of NNES scholars, either bilingual or multilingual, in the writing process and final drafts of their English research articles. It does not investigate the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that effect the production of good and not good research articles by NNES authors. This study neither documents the experience of NNES authors in writing their research articles nor examines the problems and coping strategies employed by NNES authors in writing research articles that may be due to their lack of English proficiency and competency. Besides, this study is also not a comparative study on the quality of articles produced among Malaysian tertiary institutions or with overseas institutions. It does not compare the gender of NNES authors in relation to the quality of their research articles.

This study takes into account empirical research articles written by NNES scholars and are published in Malaysia. This study does not include research articles that are not empirical in nature. It does not include empirical research articles that do not have abstracts and research articles containing opinions, discussions, review, hypothesis, argumentation, responses and reactions to earlier work and short communications. It also does not include empirical research articles written by native English speaker (NES) scholars.

The NNES authors of the empirical research articles in this study includes bilingual and multilingual scholars with no regards concerning nationality, races and religion. Thus, it includes Malaysians' and non-Malaysians' empirical research articles. The NNES scholars includes scholars who learned English as their second language and foreign language (some scholars do not learn English as their second language due to their background and environmental factors). It includes Malaysian who were raised and educated in Malaysia and overseas. It also includes academicians and researchers who have received their academic qualifications overseas, locally and both local and overseas. However, this study does not include NES scholars who published and wrote their empirical research

articles in Malaysia. It does not include Malaysian scholars who learn English as their first language even though they are bilingual or multilingual.

The chosen articles for this study are articles written and published in Malaysian journals. The journals are published by tertiary institutions and non-profit organizations. The selected empirical research articles were written by NNES scholars only. It does not include research articles published by public and private university colleges, colleges and polytechnics. This study does not examine the written texts submitted by graduates and undergraduates as a requirement of their courses. It does not examine theses and dissertations that were written as a partial fulfillment of degrees, master degrees and doctoral degrees. It does not examine conference papers and meeting papers presented by NNES scholars in Malaysia and overseas.

Lastly, this chapter has provided a brief review on the background, the gap of previous studies, the aim and objectives, operational definition of terms, significance and scope of this study. The next chapter provides an in-depth discussion concerning the empirical and theoretical literature that influenced the work of the present study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion regarding the theoretical literature of academic writing, research writing, types of justification of value of study, textual and linguistic features of justification of contribution of study. Significant findings from the empirical literature are also presented in this chapter in relation to the identification of textual and linguistic characterization of rationalizing contribution of study and their communicative functions in justifying the importance of study found in Introduction and closure sections of RAs. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary on the theoretical and empirical literature that influences the present study.

2.1 Academic Discourse

Academic discourse is a broad field that comprises all areas related to the academic field. It includes the spoken and written form of communication in the academic environment. This involves teaching that includes all the undergraduate- and postgraduate-level textbooks, lectures, tutorials, seminars and academic discussion as a part of academic discourse (Bhatia, 2002). It also includes the research papers that comprise articles, conferences, academic research reports and research grant applications or proposals. Others include examination papers and answers, project reports and theses, essays and other written works and may sometimes include course and programme descriptions (Bhatia, 2002).